

The Secret to How the Ba'al Shem Tov Derived Comprehensive Medical Knowledge from the Passuk "ויקרא אל משה"

This week's parsha is parshas Vayikra. In this essay, we wish to focus on the opening passuk (Vayikra 1, 1): **"ויקרא אל משה וידבר ה' אליו מאהל מועד לאמר—He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from Ohel Mo'ed saying . . ."** The sefer Ba'al Shem Tov (Vayikra 1) cites what the divine kabbalist Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac of Komarna, zy" a, writes in his commentary Heichal HaBerachah. He reports the incredible fact that Rabbi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov deduced all medical therapies from the words: **"He called to Moshe."**

It is clear as day that the Ba'al Shem Tov perceived the deepest secrets of the Torah, knowledge that is beyond our comprehension. Notwithstanding, it behooves us to attempt to comprehend and explain the connection between this passuk—"He called to Moshe"—and the treatment of all known diseases. Hence, I will do my best to shed some light on the subject based on precious, illuminating teachings from our sacred Rabbis. I beseech Hashem to guide me on the path of "emes."

The Gematria of חול"ה Equals 49 Indicating that an Infirm Person Lacks the Illumination of the Fiftieth Gate

The Heichal HaBerachah refers to that which is taught in Likutei Torah (Vayeira). It is apparent that he is alluding to an explanation of the Arizal's in Ta'amei HaMitzvos (Vayeira): When a person fulfills the mitzvah of "bikur cholim"—visiting someone who is ill—he should have in mind that the root of all disease stems from a lack of illumination from the fiftieth gate of "binah"—the Sha'ar HaNun.

It is for this reason that our blessed sages describe someone who is ill as a "חולה". For, the gematria of "חולה" equals 49, indicating that the sick person only has access to 49 levels of "binah." Therefore, when performing the mitzvah of "bikur cholim," one should have in mind to extend the Sha'ar HaNun to the sick person, to cure him of his disease. This explains very nicely the passuk (Eichah 2, 13): **"כי גדול כים שברך מי ירפא—your ruin is as vast as the sea; who can heal you?"** According to the Zohar hakadosh (Intro. 1b), this passuk alludes to "binah," which encompasses fifty ("nun") levels, the gematria of the word מ"י. Thus, the passuk intimates that the Fifty Levels of Binah are the key to all healing.

However, the assertion of the Arizal seems to be at odds with a well-known teaching in the Gemara (R.H. 21b): **"חמישים שיערי בינה נבראו בעולם, וכולן ניתנו למשה חסר אחד, שנאמר ותחסרהו מעט מאלקים. Fifty levels (gates) of "binah" were created in the universe, and they were all bestowed upon Moshe except for one, as it is stated (Tehillim 8, 6): "Yet You have made him only a little less than the divine."** The Gemara states explicitly that even Moshe Rabeinu, the foremost of the neviim, only attained 49 levels of "binah." So, how is it possible for anyone visiting a sick person to bestow the Sha'ar HaNun on him, when even Moshe Rabeinu did not attain that level?

In truth, it is impossible to access the Sha'ar HaNun with the human intellect. Nevertheless, without a doubt, it is possible and even necessary to tap into the illumination of all Fifty Levels of Binah of the Torah. Proof of the matter can be found in the Zohar hakadosh (Part 1, 261b). It points out that "yetzias Mitzrayim" is mentioned in the Torah fifty times. This indicates that HKB"H employed the Fifty Sha'arei Binah to

take Yisrael out of Mitzrayim. So, even though it is impossible to attain the Sha'ar HaNun; nevertheless, HKB"H shed the light of all fifty levels of "binah" on Yisrael to facilitate and accomplish the exodus from Mitzrayim.

We can now better appreciate the assertion of the Arizal. If a Jew wishes to be healthy and whole, he must tap into the illumination of all Fifty Sha'arei Binah of the holy Torah—the source of life. We express this fact when we recite the following berachah after an aliyah to the Torah: **“אשר נתן לנו תורת אמת וחי—עולם נטע בתוכנו”** **Who gave us the Torah of truth and instilled in us eternal life.** If, however, a person has no connection to the Sha'ar HaNun, then he becomes a חול"ה—an infirmed, sick person, chas v'shalom—with a gematria of 49. Hence, to remedy this predicament, he is advised to reconnect with the Sha'ar HaNun by engaging in Torah-study, which encompasses “nun”—fifty—levels of “binah.”

This is the message conveyed by the Gemara (Eiruvim 54a): **“חש בראשו יעסוק בתורה... חש בגרונו יעסוק בתורה... חש במעיו יעסוק בתורה... חש בעצמותיו יעסוק בתורה... חש בכל גופו יעסוק בתורה שנאמר ולכל בשרו מרפא.”** **One who feels pain in his head should study Torah . . . one who feels pain in his throat should study Torah . . . one who feels gastrointestinal pain should study Torah . . . one who feels pain in his bones should study Torah . . . one who feels pain in his entire body should study Torah, as it says (Mishlei 4, 22): “And a cure for his entire flesh.”** In keeping with this discussion, this implies that anyone who studies the Torah that is comprised of Fifty Sha'arei Binah merits healing from his illness, as per the passuk: **“מי ירפא לך”**.

Let us now consider what we learned from the Arizal about the proper focus of the mitzvah of “bikur cholim.” As we know, every mitzvah portends a unique good. Here, the Arizal is teaching us that the mitzvah of visiting a sick person portends imbuing him with the Sha'ar HaNun. Since this is what he lacks and is the cause of his illness, this will provide the sick person with a cure.

The Sacred Name יל"י Portends Healing

We will now try to clarify this teaching of the Arizal based on what the Arizal himself explains elsewhere. We have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 5b): **“רבי חייא בר אבא חלש, על לגביה רבי יוחנן, אמר ליה חביבין עליך יסורין, אמר ליה לא הן ולא שכרן, אמר**

ליה” **Rabbi Chiya bar Abba took ill; Rabbi Yochanan went to visit him. He asked him: “Are afflictions dear to you?” He answered him: “Neither they nor their reward.” He (Rabbi Yochanan) said to him: “Give me your hand.” He gave him his hand, and he revived him (Rabbi Yochanan cured him of his illness).**

In Sha'ar Ma'amarei Razal (Berachos 5b), the Arizal explains how Rabbi Yochanan cured him. He explains that the first letters of the three words **“יהב ליה ידיה”**—**he gave him his hand**—spell **יל"י**. This is the second name of the sacred name of 72 letters, and it portends healing—“refuah.” Therefore, to perform this “segulah,” one must say to the sick person, **הב לי ידך**—**“give me your hand.”** Then, when the sick person gives him his hand, the visitor who came to heal him should say, **יהב ליה ידיה**, and have in mind the aforementioned sacred three-letter name. This will revive him from his illness.

The Kehillas Yaakov (Ma'arechet “yud”) connects the two teachings of the Arizal magnificently. Firstly, we learned that the root of all disease is the lack of illumination from the Sha'ar HaNun. Secondly, we learned that the name **יל"י** portends healing the sick person of his illness. Additionally, we find a pertinent third teaching from the Arizal. In Likutei Torah (Ki Sisa), he points out that the gematria of the name **יל"י** is **50**, alluding to the Fifty Sha'arei Binah, which were instrumental in the exodus from Mitzrayim.

Clearly, this enlightens us as to why the name **יל"י** portends “refuah.” Since the gematria of this name is **50**, alluding to the Fifty Sha'arei Binah, it has the power to provide a sick person with the Sha'ar HaNun that he lacks. Thus, all three teachings of the Arizal that we presented complement each other magnificently. This is the gist of his sacred remarks.

We can now better appreciate the Arizal's assertion that the focus of the mitzvah of “bikur cholim” should be to imbue the sick person with the Sha'ar HaNun that he lacks. Furthermore, if the one visiting the sick person is whole and healthy, he is connected with the illumination of the Fifty Sha'arei Binah. Hence, when the sick person gives him his hand, he can imbue him with the powerful illumination of the Sha'ar HaNun, which will enable him to rise from his sickbed and be healed.

This explains very nicely what the Arizal teaches in Sha'ar HaKavanos (Kabbalas Shabbas 1). When reciting the words "י"י ל'אורך ימים"—**O Hashem, may it be for lengthy days**—in Tehillim 93, one should have in mind the name "י"י, which is formed by their first letters. Since this name portends "refuah," it can provide a person with longevity.

The Miniature Aleph Alludes to the Fact that as a Consequence of the Cheit HaEigel Moshe Rabeinu Was Only Left with One of the One Thousand Lights that He Had Been Given

With this introduction, we will now proceed to explain the statement of the esteemed Rabbi of Komarna in Heichal HaBerachah, citing the Ba'al Shem Tov hakadosh, that he derived the therapies for all disease from the passuk: "ויקרא אל משה"—**Hashem summoned Moshe**. We have already presented the Arizal's contention that all disease and illness stem from a lack of the Sha'ar HaNun, and that it is incumbent on the person visiting the sick person to impart the Sha'ar HaNun to him. Where, however, is this evident from the passuk: "ויקרא אל משה"?

Hence, I would like to share with my royal audience that which Hashem has shown me. Let us refer to what the Ba'al HaTurim writes regarding the tradition to write the "aleph" of the word "ויקרא" as a **miniature "aleph."** As we know, due to Moshe Rabeinu's extreme humility, he chose to inscribe this "aleph" as a small letter to minimize his own importance. If that is so, then why didn't he do the same thing when inscribing the words in parshas Yisro in connection with Matan Torah (Shemos 19, 20)? There, it also says: "ויקרא ה'" "למשה אל ראש ההר"—**Hashem summoned Moshe to the top of the mountain**—and Moshe did not argue with HKB"H. He agreed to write the word "ויקרא" with a standard, normal-sized "aleph." So, why did Moshe insist specifically in this passuk at the beginning of sefer Vayikra to write the word "ויקרא" with a **miniature "aleph"?**

I would like to propose a wonderful solution to this difficult question. We will rely on what the Arizal teaches us in Sha'ar HaKavanos (Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbas). He reveals the incredible reason why the "aleph" of "ויקרא" in our parsha is inscribed as a small letter. It signifies that as

a consequence of the "cheit ha'eigel," Moshe Rabeinu had to forfeit all but one of the one thousand ("eleph") lights that he received at Matan Torah.

Let us embellish this thought. The word "אלף" represents two extremes. If we pronounce it "**aleph**," it is the smallest of numerals; it equals one. If, however, we pronounce it "**eleph**," it is a very large number; it is the beginning of the thousands. Along these lines, the Bnei Yissaschar writes (Shabbasos 3, 8) that this is the underlying meaning of the passuk (Devarim 32, 30): "איכה ירדוף אחד אלף"—**how could one pursue a thousand?** In other words, the one can become one thousand and vice-versa.

This clarifies the explanation of the Arizal regarding the miniature "**aleph**" fantastically. As a normal-sized letter, the "aleph" can allude to אָלֶף—**one thousand**. When, however, it is miniaturized, it alludes to its minimal value of **one**. Now, since, in the aftermath of the "cheit ha'eigel," Moshe Rabeinu only retained one—אֶלֶף—of the one thousand—אָלֶף—lights he had received, the letter "**aleph**" appears as a small letter, indicating that his gift had been significantly diminished.

This can be seen explicitly in the pesukim (Shemos 32, 7): "וידבר ה' אל משה לך רד כי שחת עמך אשר העלית מארץ מצרים, סרו מהר מן הדרך אשר צויתם, עשו להם עגל מסכה וישתחוו לו ויזבחו לו, ויאמרו אלה Hashem spoke to Moshe: **"Go, descend; for your nation that you have brought up from Mitzrayim has acted corruptly. They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them; they have made themselves a molten calf, prostrated themselves to it and sacrificed to it. And they said, 'This is your god, O Yisrael, which brought you up from the land of Mitzrayim.'**" Rashi comments: "וידבר"—**this term denotes harshness . . . "Go, descend" from your greatness. I did not give you greatness except on their account. At that moment, Moshe was banished by decree of the Heavenly Court. "Your nation . . . has acted corruptly": It does not say "the nation has acted corruptly" but rather "your nation," the "Erev Rav" (mixed multitude) whom you accepted of your own volition and converted them, but you did not consult Me. And you said, "It is good that converts should attach themselves to the Shechinah"; they became corrupt and have corrupted others.**

From Rashi's comment, we learn that HKB"H informed Moshe of two things: Firstly, that whatever greatness HKB"H had given at Matan Torah was solely on account of Yisrael. Hence, when they declined from their lofty status, Moshe declined with them. Secondly, that the Erev Rav, whom Moshe had taken into their midst of his own volition, were responsible for corrupting Yisrael. Understood in this light, we can interpret Moshe's remark to HKB"H as follows (ibid. 32, 32): "ועתה אם תשא חטאתם ואם אין מחני נא מספרך אשר כתבת"—**and now, if You would but bear their sin; but if not, erase me from Your book that You have written**—because I brought the Erev Rav into their midst; hence, I am responsible for the "cheit ha'eigel."

With great joy, this resolves our quandary. Moshe agreed to inscribe the "ויקרא" associated with Matan Torah with a normal-sized "aleph," whereas, due to his extreme humility, he wished to inscribe the "ויקרא" in this week's parsha as a miniature "aleph." It is because at Matan Torah, Moshe Rabeinu was privileged to receive all one thousand lights on account of Yisrael. Therefore, he inscribed a normal-sized "aleph" to symbolize that he had received all אֶלֶף lights.

Here, on the other hand, in parshas Vayikra, in the aftermath of the "cheit ha'eigel," all but one of the lights had been confiscated from Moshe Rabeinu, and he felt that it was his fault. Therefore, he pleaded to inscribe the word "ויקרא" with a miniature "aleph." He wished to signify that by accepting the Erev Rav into Yisrael's midst, he had caused Yisrael to sin and, as a consequence, he deserved to have all but one—represented by the small "aleph"—of the אֶלֶף lights taken away from him.

This concurs magnificently with what Rabbi Yaakov Tzemach brings down in the sefer Ranu L'Yaakov in the name of Rabeinu Chaim Vital. He explains the deeper significance of the following passuk (Koheles 7, 28):

"אדם אחד מאלף מצאתי ואשה בכל אלה לא מצאתי"—**one man in a thousand I have found, but one woman among them I have not found. This passuk relates to the matter of the eigel. "One man in a thousand" alludes to the one thousand lights that he (Moshe Rabeinu) received with the Torah . . . But after the incident of the eigel, the thousand lights vanished, and only one of a thousand remained. This is**

symbolized by the small "aleph" of Vayikra, which is only one part of a large "aleph." "But one woman among them I have not found," because we do not find that the women donated gold jewelry to the eigel. This is the implication: "But I did not find (the participation of) even a single woman among all of your gods (the eigel)."

The One Thousand Lights Are the Sha'ar HaNun

Following this sublime path, we will now proceed to explain how the Ba'al Shem Tov derived all medical therapies from the passuk "ויקרא אל משה", the passuk with the tradition to inscribe a miniature "aleph." We will refer once again to the Gemara cited above: "חמישים שערי בינה נבראו בעולם, וכולן ניתנו למשה חסר אחד, שנאמר ותחסרהו מעט מאלקים"—**fifty levels (gates) of "binah" were created in the universe, and they were all bestowed upon Moshe except for one, as it is stated: "Yet You have made him only a little less than the divine."** Why did Chazal say: "And they were all bestowed upon Moshe except for one" instead of simply saying: "Only forty-nine were bestowed upon Moshe"?

We find a wonderful explanation from the Arizal in Likutei Torah (Vaeschanan). At Matan Torah, Moshe Rabeinu did in fact attain all Fifty Sha'arei Binah. After the "cheit ha'eigel," however, one of the fifty levels was taken away from him. This is alluded to in the Torah by the words "לך רד"—**go, descend**—descend from "לך". In other words, HKB"H instructed Moshe to descend from the Sha'ar HaNun—the fiftieth level, the gematria of ל"ך (30+20=50). Nevertheless, when he passed away, he was privileged to attain the Sha'ar HaNun once again. This explains the precise language used by Chazal in the Gemara. They were hinting to us that initially Moshe Rabeinu attained all fifty levels without exception; subsequently, however, he had to forfeit one of them.

It appears that we can explain HKB"H's rationale for revealing all Fifty Sha'arei Binah to Moshe Rabeinu at Matan Torah, prior to the "cheit ha'eigel," based on the following teaching in the Gemara (A.Z. 5a):

"לא קיבלו ישראל את התורה אלא כדי שלא יהא מלאך המות שולט בהן, שנאמר אני אמרתי אלהים אתם ובני עליין כולכם, חבלתם מעשיכם אכן כאדם תמותון."

Yisrael only received the Torah, so that the Malach Hamaves would not prevail over them, as it is stated (Tehillim 82, 6): “I said, ‘You are divine, sons of the Most High are you all.” However, you have corrupted your deeds (with the “cheit ha’eigel”) and therefore (ibid.): “Like men you shall die.” Rashi comments: “I said, ‘You are divine,” (implying that they were) like malachim. When I gave you the Torah, I gave it to you, so that the Malach Hamaves would no longer prevail over you. However, “like human beings (Adam) you shall die.” Indeed, like Adam HaRishon you shall die, since you have corrupted your ways like him. In other words, the death sentence imposed on humanity because of Adam HaRishon had been rescinded at Matan Torah; but it was reinstated on account of the “cheit ha’eigel.”

We can now appreciate why HKB”H revealed all Fifty Sha’arei Binah to Moshe at the time of Matan Torah, so that he could transmit them to Yisrael. By doing so, all the diseases known to mankind would have been eradicated, in keeping with the passuk: **”מי ירפא לך”**—**the fifty (”מי”) will heal you.** Consequently, people would have no longer continued to die; the death sentence would have no longer been in effect. After the “cheit ha’eigel,” however, HKB”H confiscated the Sha’ar HaNun from Moshe Rabeinu when He said **”לך רד”**, because it was necessary to reinstate the death decree.

With the utmost reverence and love, we can explain how HKB”H transmitted all Fifty Sha’arei Binah to Moshe Rabeinu at Matan Torah. We learn in the Midrash (B.R. 1, 11) that the young children came and expounded on the double-letters **ך**—**the letters of the aleph-Beis that have two distinct forms.** In relation to the letter **”kaf,”** which alludes to the palm of the hand, they expounded **כ”ך כ”ך**: The two forms of the letter **”kaf”** allude to the fact that the Torah was given **”from hand to hand—from the hand of HKB”H to the hand of Moshe.”**

Now, we learned above that giving one’s hand to another—**”יָהֵב לַיָּדַיָּה”**—invokes the name **”יל”**, whose gematria is fifty, corresponding to the Fifty Sha’arei Binah; it portends the healing of the sick. Thus, we can suggest that HKB”H gave the Torah to Moshe from hand to hand to annul the death sentence He had imposed on creation. So that if Yisrael would study the Torah that was given from the hand of HKB”H to Moshe’s

hand—creating the situation of **”יָהֵב לַיָּדַיָּה”**—they would be able to eliminate all diseases and all death.

One of the One Thousand Lights Remained to Provide Cures for the Sick

In light of everything we have discussed, it is apparent that the one thousand lights imparted to Moshe Rabeinu at Matan Torah were in actuality the Sha’ar HaNun of the Fifty Sha’arei Binah that possesses the capacity to eliminate all disease from the world. In fact, when Moshe Rabeinu received them for the purpose of transmitting them to Yisrael, the death decree ceased to be in effect for Yisrael. Nevertheless, as explained, as a consequence of the “cheit ha’eigel,” it came back into effect, because the one thousand lights—the Sha’ar HaNun—were confiscated from Moshe.

Now, I would like to propose a novel explanation. I would like to explain why HKB”H left one of the one thousand lights with Moshe Rabeinu, which inspired Shlomo HaMelech to say: **”אדם אחד מאלף מצאתי”**—**one man in a thousand I have found.** Indeed, as a consequence of the “cheit ha’eigel,” Yisrael were once again subjected to the death decree, and all forms of disease returned, G-d help us, since they are due to the absence of the Sha’ar HaNun. Nevertheless, due to HKB”H’s infinite mercy and kindness, He still wanted to provide Yisrael with treatment of their illnesses. Hence, he left one of the one thousand lights with Moshe Rabeinu, which was still intimately related and inseparable from the Sha’ar HaNun.

Accordingly, we now have a novel interpretation of Chazal’s statement: **”Fifty gates of “binah” were created in the universe, and they were all bestowed upon Moshe except for one.”** In other words, all of the Fifty Sha’arei Binah were given to Moshe **“except for one”**—he lacked the most unique of the gates, the Sha’ar HaNun. Yet, of all the one thousand lights comprising the Sha’ar HaNun, **“one”** remained as a source of medical cures for Yisrael.

Now, we know that an element of Moshe Rabeinu is present in every Torah scholar, as we are taught in the Tikunei Zohar (Tikun 69): **His extension is present in every generation, in every tzaddik and scholar who engages in Torah-study, up to six-hundred thousand.** With this in mind, the Ohr

HaChaim hakadosh (at the beginning of parshas Tetzaveh) and the Shela hakadosh (Maseches Shevuos) explain a remark that appears repeatedly in the Gemara (Shabbas 101a, Succah 39a, Beitzah 38b, Chullin 93a). It was customary for the Amoraim to say to one another: "משה שפיר קאמרת"—**Moshe, you have spoken well.** They were alluding to the fact that every "talmid-chacham" possesses within him a spark from Moshe Rabeinu.

Based on this, every person who studies the Torah that Hashem gave to Moshe Rabeinu possesses a "nitzotz" of Moshe and, therefore, one of the one thousand lights from the Sha'ar HaNun. This enables him to heal himself of any malady. In the words of Chazal cited above: **"One who feels pain anywhere**

in his body should study Torah, as it says: "And a cure for his entire flesh."

Clearly, this illuminates for us what the Heichal HaBerachah brings down in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov hakadosh, zy" a: **He derived all forms of medical therapy from the passuk "ויקרא אל משה"**. As we learned from the Arizal, Moshe inscribed the word "ויקרא" with a miniature **"aleph"** to indicate that as a consequence of the "cheit ha'eigel," he had to forfeit all of the thousand lights except for one. Nevertheless, that one remaining, outstanding light from the Sha'ar HaNun provides Torah-scholars access to healing powers in keeping with the passuk: **"מי ירפא לך"**.



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